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A Plea in Behalf of Peace. 1900

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A PLEA  
IN  
BEHALF OF PEACE

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ADDRESSED TO CHRISTIAN PROFESSORS  
OF EVERY NAME

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ISSUED UNDER AUTHORITY OF THE YEARLY MEETING  
OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS, FOR  
PENNA., NEW JERSEY AND DELAWARE, BY A  
MEETING OF ITS REPRESENTATIVES, HELD IN  
PHILADA., 5TH MO. 11TH, 1900

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## A PLEA IN BEHALF OF PEACE

ADDRESSED TO CHRISTIAN PROFESSORS OF EVERY NAME

It is with love for our fellow-countrymen of every class, and in that brotherly freedom which is permitted and enjoined by the gospel, that we desire to call your attention to the responsibility which we all share in common, in shaping the present and prospective relations between our beloved country and other nations. It has pleased the All-wise and beneficent Ruler of the universe to permit us to hold a territory of vast extent and almost limitless resources. The form of government under which we have grown and prospered is admirably adapted to meet the needs of a free, enlightened and virtuous people. This, when administered with an eye to their highest interests, and the favor of the Most High, presents a system which other nations may well desire to make their own. Are we not, therefore, bound in all gratitude to see to it that these rich blessings be not perverted to purposes out of *harmony with the Divine government?*

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Yet, as thoughtful observers of some of the events in which the United States has of late been a chief actor, we can scarcely fail to be impressed with their disastrous and far-reaching character. They, and the causes which have led up to them are so fresh in the memory of all that they need not be here recited. The fact nevertheless remains that war, with all its horrors, has engaged our country for a long period, and is still being persistently carried on in remote regions.

While present conditions continue, the danger increases that in an outburst of popular feeling, such as carried us into a war with Spain and opened the way for another with the natives of the Philippines, we shall be swept entirely away from that safe position which hitherto the immense territory and the geographical outlines of the United States have made it easy to maintain. Our people may thus be plunged into the current which is ever threatening the peace of warlike nations bent upon self-aggrandizement.

Such considerations should be sufficient to bring home to each one of us questions like these: "What is my attitude in this crisis, as a professed follower of the Prince of Peace!" "Is my influence decidedly felt in the community in which I live, in favor of some speedy, just and peaceful settlement of the difficult problems that

now confront the Federal authorities?" "Or, through apathy as regards the whole subject, or a careless acceptance of the sentiments prevailing around me, or from a secret fear of incurring the scorn or ridicule of others, am I shrinking from the plain duty to stand faithfully by my Divine Master, His teachings and His example?"

We are familiar with the leading arguments whereby it is sought to justify, or even commend war, as the most satisfactory, if not the only method, for settling international differences. That upon which much stress is laid by many professing Christians is the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, wherein are recorded conflicts that evidently received the Divine approval, and indeed command. To this the consistent followers of Christ must reply that, with a change of dispensations, there was introduced a rule of conduct which would substitute love for hatred, forgiveness for revenge, the returning of kindness for injuries—in short, "a new covenant" between God and man, which, as compared with the old, is surely "established upon better promises." Those, therefore, who acknowledge the binding authority of the latter, rejoice to realize that they are no longer "under the law, but under grace;" that the coming of the Saviour, whose name they love to bear, was heralded by *the angelic strain*, "Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace, good will toward men." This, to their view, expresses the whole scope of the gospel. They further remember the plain precepts contained in that memorable Sermon on the Mount, whereby the Master intended his disciples should order their daily lives and intercourse with their fellow-men.

All must admit that the spirit here inculcated is utterly repugnant to the strife, carnage, misery and destruction inseparable from every battle-field. In this connection, we may fitly recall our Lord's gracious declaration concerning himself. "The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them," and again, his express condemnation of war—"all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Following closely their Saviour's precepts and example, his apostles and their immediate converts could take no part in warfare, so that until near the middle of the second century of the Christian era scarcely a Christian soldier is upon record. When pressed into the Roman legions, these early disciples responded, "I am a Christian, and therefore I cannot fight." Nothing was then left them but to suffer.

The argument from expediency, although often urged, must occupy but a low place in influencing one whose standard of righteousness has been lifted above considerations of mere gain or *selfish purposes* when these plainly conflict with



the higher rule received from Christ. Can that be expedient for him, which cannot fail to beget in his own breast wrath, hatred, revenge and deadly strife?

In order to reconcile a demand for personal military service with the repugnance which the Christian believer may well feel toward engaging in it, perhaps no more plausible or successful plea is urged than his paramount duty to the state. The love for one's country has very properly a strong place in the human breast, and is productive of many excellent results. So also is a loyal regard for its wholesome laws, and constituted authorities. But neither of these can be a sufficient warrant for the follower of Christ to violate by any act of his own what he is bound to believe is directly opposed to the teachings or commands of his Divine Master. One course only may be open to him, namely, a meek but firm refusal. The final result he must leave with Him for whose sake he is called to leave all, and whom he should be ready to follow, if need be, "to prison or to death." Nor is a moral courage thus displayed to be regarded as in any-wise inferior in its character or results for good, to that of the man who, at the demand of his country, risks life and limb upon the field of battle.

*Is war however, inevitable? as is continually*

asserted. Indeed, would it occur where there is a disposition to refer the questions at issue to one or more impartial judges? Such a method has been so frequently and successfully resorted to, that it is no longer regarded as an expedient of doubtful value. Within the past century this reasonable, just and peaceful course has been adopted by our own or other nations in more than one hundred cases, and to more than half of these the United States has been a party. By the late Conference at the Hague, a system was formulated that has met the approval of many of the most eminent statesmen and jurists of the present day. The acceptance of such a tribunal by the leading nations of the world, we believe, would go far toward the peaceful settlement of controversies that may hereafter arise.

It is, as we reverently believe, under the constraining spirit of the one Blessed Head of the Church that we have felt led in much brotherly love to call all who profess the name of Christ to divest themselves, if needful, of their preconceptions on the subject before us. These we cannot doubt are largely the result of early education and surroundings, or, it may be, a too ready acceptance of views advocated by the prevailing literature of the day, or, again, they may indicate a lack of faith in the teachings of the

Saviour and their applicability to the present conditions of the world.

In order to reach right convictions regarding questions of vital importance to ourselves and our fellow-men, we all need a wisdom better than our own. By its aid we may find the plain teachings of the Lord Jesus directly at variance with those largely prevailing around us; indeed, they may be very difficult to reconcile with the line of reasoning whereby we may have reached certain conclusions. If this be so, let us remember with the deepest gratitude that, when our Lord was about to leave his sorrowing disciples, he sought to reassure their faith in him by these ever memorable words: "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you; and I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of Truth." Elsewhere, when pressing upon them the keeping of his words or commandments, as the test of their love for him, he continues: "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and show it unto you."

When, therefore, we find ourselves confronted

- with problems very difficult of solution, and that, under our methods of reasoning, we often reach conclusions that are still both faulty and unsatisfactory to ourselves, let us reverently call to mind the gracious promises concerning the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the sent of the Father in the name of the Son. As we pray for more and more of his quickening power, a light we may have never known before is thrown upon passages in the Holy Scriptures, which will make them plain to our spiritual vision. Misgivings as to the practical application of some of our Lord's precepts will vanish, and we shall perceive very clearly the points upon which they must always differ from that lower standard of truth and duty which man in his ignorance or rebelliousness has set up.

If these be not among the direct results of the enlightening, energizing power of the Holy Spirit, we may in all candor ask where else shall we look for them? How otherwise are we to interpret the offices and prerogatives of the Comforter, as set forth in the declaration of our Divine Master, already referred to? Is it not, then, for want of a fuller acceptance of just this doctrine that we see to-day so many evidences of weak convictions, a wavering faith, and so little of that courage which would lead men to meet loss, or scorn or death itself, rather than forsake

"the truth as it is in Jesus." In what other direction, therefore, than among the professed followers of Christ shall we look for stanch and willing advocates of his gospel of love, mercy and peace?

The rightful position of the church of Christ, as set forth by himself, is that of a leader not to be turned aside in its high mission for the regeneration and happiness of the world. Its voice is to give no uncertain sound, and the men and women who compose its membership are to be "as lights in the world," and as "the salt of the earth." Since we dare not assume that the commandments and teachings of our Blessed Saviour were delivered prematurely in point of time, we must believe they are especially applicable to the present conditions of the world, and that mankind is greatly the loser by not promptly accepting them in all the fullness of their blessing, and faithfully living up to them.

We rejoice to believe there is a large and increasing number, throughout the various branches of the professing church, who have come to realize that, if the errors and evils and wretchedness that now abound are to be effectually met, it must be largely through the faithfulness of Christian believers. As these follow their own highest convictions of truth and duty, *they will be surely drawn into closer fellowship*

with one another, and sweetly find that, in the one Master, all they are brethren. Thus also will be brought about the harmonious, if not united action, which can deal wisely and powerfully with evils, even so gigantic as war, and through the same instrumentality our own and other nations will be brought to seek the things that make for peace the world over.

When we consider the large proportion which the various organizations of professing Christians bear to the population of our own and other civilized countries; the general intelligence that characterizes them; or the high standard of virtue which they seek to uphold; it is not strange that the church has come to be regarded as the highest human agency in the upward progress of our race. Let not such a hope be disappointed.

Holding a vantage ground so favorable, with purposes so exalted, and a power when rightly directed so vast both spiritually and numerically, must not the responsibility for the continuance of a system so anti-christian as war, fall directly upon the professing church? As we verily believe, in its hands rests to-day the peace of the world. If then this burden has been laid upon the church by its Holy Head, let it be borne in His name, and in the strength He will give for so blessed a service. *While its*

mission is thus fraught with love and tender sympathy for the whole human race, it has none the less a conflict to maintain against wrong in every form, however specious. But let us remember that, although its weapons are not, and cannot be carnal, they are nevertheless "mighty through God to the pulling down" of those strongholds of evil which spring from the lusts and uncontrolled passions of men; that this contest for the truth and the right, though sharp and long, will in the end be victorious, and He shall thus reign who is "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." In this crowning victory let us remember every true-hearted follower of Christ will have a part, and in his daily life and the spirit which actuates him, he will be bearing a convincing testimony that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

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